

SEATED FLEXIBILITY ACTIVITIES

SEATED WHOLE-BODY STRETCH

Stretching should feel great the entire time you're doing it. A good stretch is an enjoyable tightness across the desired muscles. Nothing should hurt. Deep breathing can make a stretch work and feel better. There are many types of seated stretching, several of which are outlined next. I always prefer to start with toes, feet, and ankles and work up from there. Remind participants that they should follow their doctor's advice and do only what feels comfortable.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Stretches key joints for better posture and balance.
- ⦿ Prepares participants for exercise.
- ⦿ Draws participants' focus to their body.
- ⦿ Feels good.

How to Do It »

This gentle whole-body stretch starts with the ankles and feet and moves upward from there. Participants begin comfortably seated, their hips and back against their chair.

Ankles, Feet, and Toes

Use the following cues to guide participants.

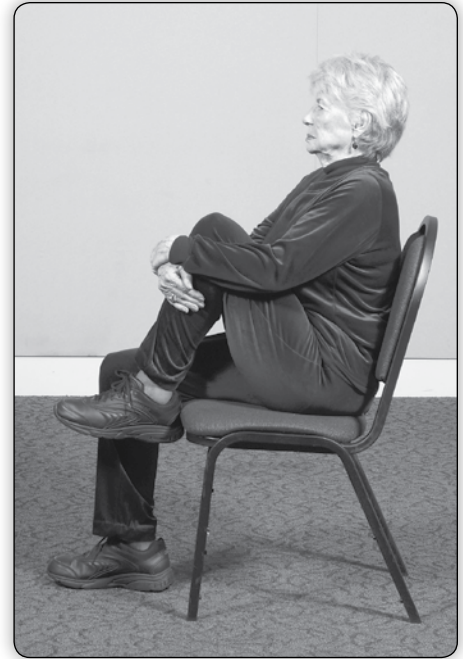
- ⦿ Lift both feet forward and up off the ground.
- ⦿ Point and flex both ankles a few times
- ⦿ Hold the pointed position a few moments, and hold the flexed a few moments.
- ⦿ Draw big, relaxing circles with the feet.
- ⦿ Try to bring the bottoms of the feet together (supination).
- ⦿ Lift outside borders of the feet upward (pronation).
- ⦿ Do a few ankle alphabets (pick a participant's name to write in the air).
- ⦿ Wriggle, scrunch, and spread out the toes like starfish (you can do hands and fingers at the same time, if you like).



Knee Hugs

This activity is good for gluteal muscles and hips. Use the following cues.

- Start with the back and hips against the chair back.
- Slide the hands under one knee and lift it toward the chest.
- Hug the knee closer to the chest, wrapping hands or forearms around it.
- Breathe, relax, and give the stretch time to develop; hold 10 to 15 seconds.



Crossovers

This is a good activity to stretch the outer thigh (hip abductors). Participants with a hip replacement or recent surgery should have their doctor's clearance to do this stretch—it pulls on the joint in a way that may be destabilizing to the joint.

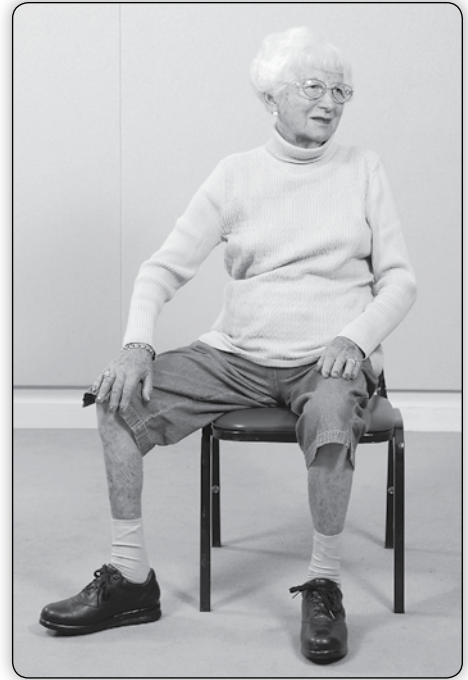
- Start with the back and hips against the chair back.
- Use the hands to lift one knee up and cross it over the other knee, as comfortable.
- Tilt the crossed legs over to one side so that the top leg begins to stretch.
- To progress, use both hands to pull the top leg gently across the chest, toward the opposite shoulder.
- Breathe, relax, and give the stretch time to develop; hold 10 to 15 seconds.
- For more stretch, pull the back away from the chair and sit tall, holding the knee close.



Pull-Aparts

This is a good stretch for the inner thighs (hip adductors).

- Sit tall at the front of the chair, shoulders over hips, abs braced.
- Draw one knee out to the side; keep the knee and ankle vertically stacked.
- Repeat this in-and-out motion a few times to warm up the joint.
- Hold the out position a few moments.
- Gently press the knee out a little more with one hand to increase the stretch.
- Sit a little taller and breathe in (adds to the stretch).
- Exhale and turn the upper body away from the knee (adds to the stretch).
- Turn back to center.
- Breathe and relax.



Gentlemen's Bow (Seated)

The bow in Gentlemen's Bow involves forward leaning. It's a good stretch for the hips, hamstrings, gluteal muscles, and low back. Be sure to cue for back support. During the forward leaning, have participants rest some of their upper-body weight on the bent knee. Also avoid spinal bending during the forward leaning. Cue participants not to bend their back but to lean forward from their hips. The bow should occur at the hips, like a hinge, with the back held tall and straight and with core muscles braced.

- Sit tall at the front of the chair, both feet flat on the floor, legs parallel.
- Extend one leg out and place the heel on the floor. Then pull it back under the knee. Repeat this knee flexion and extension three to four times to warm up the knee. After the last extension, leave the heel out on the floor with the knee as straight as is comfortable.
- Sit tall again to start the stretch. (This makes a nice hamstring stretch.)
- Draw in the abdominal wall and slowly begin to lean forward from the hips. Place one arm on the opposite leg for back support. Continue to lean forward in a movement that looks like a slow, graceful Shakespearean bow over the straight leg. Allow the stretch to develop; hold 10 to 15 seconds.
- To progress, reach the long arm out in front and lift the arm and trunk slowly until the arm is reaching toward the ceiling.



Proud Mary

Hip flexor muscles cover the front portion of the hip joint and play a key role in upright posture. When hip flexors are overly tight, posture appears bent over at the hip and standing up straight and tall is difficult. These muscles are commonly tight in older adults from leaning forward when they walk or use a walker. An effective hip flexor stretch that can be done seated is challenging to find. Proud Mary is my best attempt at a seated hip flexor stretch. Some of my participants have a hard time getting the foot turned under. See how it works for you. If you find one you like better, then please e-mail your suggestion to me (renewablefitness@comcast.net).

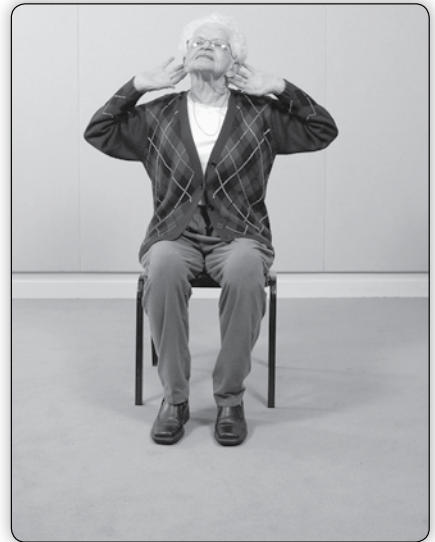
- ⦿ Sit sideways on a chair, outermost leg off the chair, knee hanging toward the floor, in a half-kneeling position, foot turned sole up, so its top side is on the floor.
- ⦿ Begin with the back tall and straight, one hand on the chair, the other on their hip.
- ⦿ To stretch the hip flexor, push the outer hip forward and gently draw the outer leg back.
- ⦿ Look proud! Lift the chest up and out, draw the shoulders back, and take a deep breath to fill the lungs and expand the stretch.
- ⦿ Keep hand on the hip to keep stretching.
- ⦿ To progress, pull the upper body back slightly.



Sunbursts

This activity stretches the chest and shoulders.

- Begin from a Tall Sit position.
- Extend both arms out to the side at shoulder height.
- Spread the fingers out.
- Slowly lower the arms toward the chair until a stretch is felt across the chest and front of shoulders.
- Like the sun coming up over the horizon, lift the arms laterally back to shoulder height and beyond, as comfortable. Stretch should be felt across the chest and shoulders.
- Bend the elbows in and place the hands behind the ears.
- Draw the elbows back and take in a deep breath.
- Lift the chest and face upward to expand the stretch.
- Exhale and bring the arms down gently.



Hands Up!

This is a variation of Sunbursts for internal and external shoulder rotation.

- ⦿ Lift both arms forward at shoulder height.
- ⦿ Pull the elbows back and then lift the forearms (looks like a robber who's been told "Hands up!" by a police officer).
- ⦿ Inhale and hold the position.
- ⦿ Exhale and rotate the forearms downward. Keep the upper arms at shoulder level, if able.
- ⦿ Repeat and rest.



Inside-Out Arms

This activity stretches the upper back and posterior shoulders and begins from a Tall Sit position.

- ⦿ Extend both arms out to the side at shoulder height.
- ⦿ Bring them both in front still at shoulder height.
- ⦿ Intertwine the fingers and turn the hands inside out.
- ⦿ Round the back gently without leaning forward.
- ⦿ Pull the arms back and sit tall again.
- ⦿ Roll the shoulders backward a few times to help recover good posture.

Wrist Pulls

This activity stretches the back and shoulders.

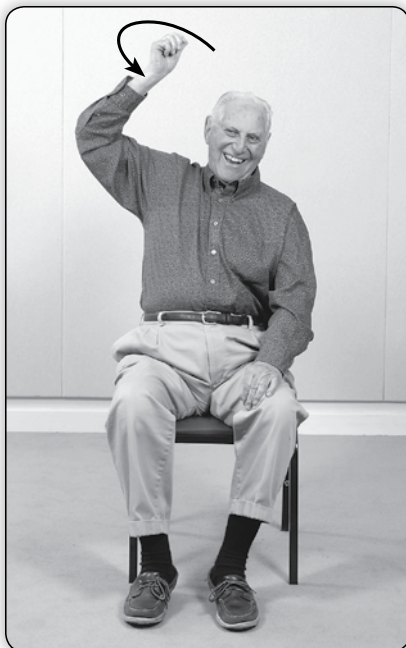
- ⦿ Inhale and reach for the sky with one arm, reaching up as far as possible. Exhale and return to the starting position.
- ⦿ Inhale and reach up as far as you can with the other arm. Exhale and return to the starting position.
- ⦿ Now reach both arms straight up in the air, fingers reaching.
- ⦿ Inhale and one hand should grab the opposite wrist and pull gently. Allow the trunk to arch a bit to expand the stretch into the shoulders and ribs. Exhale while holding the stretch.
- ⦿ Breathe in deeply again and repeat the pull on the other wrist. Allow the trunk to arch a bit to expand the stretch into the shoulders and ribs. Exhale while holding the stretch.
- ⦿ Wriggle the fingers while bringing both arms down to rest, hands on lap.
- ⦿ Roll the shoulders and relax.



(Parentheticals)

This activity stretches the lateral sides, ribs, triceps, and shoulders. The resultant body position looks like parentheses; you'll make one to each side. Technically, they're side bends, but the amount of side bending should only be slight. Provide back support by placing the opposite arm on the chair or chair's arm. See if you can get participants to notice how deep breaths help the stretch.

- ⦿ Sit tall and place one arm on the chair for back support.
- ⦿ Inhale and reach up as far as possible with the other arm.
- ⦿ Exhale, and gently arch the trunk slightly so that the stretch is felt through the ribs and shoulder. (This will look like a parenthesis).
- ⦿ Inhale and bend the reaching arm at the elbow. Try to place that hand on the opposite shoulder.
- ⦿ Exhale and gently arch ribs over the supporting arm.
- ⦿ You can add to the stretch by continuing to lift the elbow overhead. Imagine the rib cage gently spreading as the elbow pulls.
- ⦿ Gently bring the arm down.
- ⦿ Do the other side: Inhale and reach up; exhale and bend the elbow. Inhale and arch over; exhale and come down.



Lariat Arms

Pretend you're a cowboy getting ready to lasso a calf. The rope hand swirls out to the side, then forward, then over the head and back. These are big, rolling shoulder circles. Perfect.

- ⦿ Do big, rolling arm circles with one arm—out to the side, then forward, then over the head and back.
- ⦿ Repeat with the other arm.

Shoulder Rolls

- ⦿ Begin with a series of slow, big shoulder rolls. (Always roll the shoulders backward.)
- ⦿ Do both shoulders together.
- ⦿ Stop at the top (shoulders pulled to ears); stop again with shoulders pulled back (extra chest stretch).
- ⦿ Do some rolls alternating shoulders.
- ⦿ Take deep, slow breaths while doing these to expand the chest wall.

Head Tilts and Rolls

- ⦿ Sit tall with the chin level. Draw the head back as far as possible; the goal is ears aligned with the shoulders. Inhale.
- ⦿ Exhale and draw both shoulders down.
- ⦿ Tilt the left ear toward the left shoulder.
- ⦿ Drop the chin forward to the collarbone.
- ⦿ Roll the chin along the collarbone to the left shoulder.
- ⦿ Lift the head and inhale.
- ⦿ Repeat on the other side in the other direction.



Head Turns

- ⦿ Sit tall. Pull the head back so the ears are more over the shoulders. Inhale.
- ⦿ Exhale and turn the head to the right, as is comfortable for the neck.
- ⦿ Hold just a few seconds.
- ⦿ Turn back to center and inhale.
- ⦿ Repeat on the other side.



Chin Dips

- Sit tall and draw the head back (ears in line with shoulders, chin level). Inhale.
- Place two fingers on the chin.
- Exhale and gently press the chin to the neck.
- Try to maintain the Tall Sit position.
- Hold the neck stretch for 10 to 15 seconds, as tolerated.



Live It »

Taking time to do a whole-body stretch prepares participants for exercise and gets them to focus on their body. Seated Whole-Body Stretch can be done by just about anyone, anywhere.